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AN ARCHAIC GREEK GRAVE
MONUMENT

HEAD OF YOUTH FROM STELE

IN the latter part of the year 1911 the Museum acquired, by purchase out of the Hewitt Fund, a very remarkable monument of early Greek art, which is now on exhibition in Gallery 11 of the first floor. This is a grave stele, of unusual size — it is indeed the largest one of the archaic period known — and decorated with an elaborateness which also makes it unique among the surviving monuments of its class. In the decorations both sculpture and painting were employed; and of the colors which were used enough still remains upon certain parts of the surface to enable us not only to see their application to the sculpture, but even to trace some of the designs that were represented only through them. On account of its archaeological importance this stele will be made the subject of an exhaustive study by Mr. John Marshall, to be published elsewhere later, but in anticipation of his essay a description of it may be given here for the benefit of readers of the *BULLETIN* and visitors to the Museum.

In its general features it belongs to a type which was frequently adopted by the Greeks for their gravestones in the archaic period, as well as later, consisting of a tall slender slab or shaft — the stele proper — mounted upon a rectangular base, and

crowned by a finial. As was usual in the earlier monuments of this class, the front of the slab bears a full-length representation of the deceased, carved in relief, but while all other examples have only one figure, this has two — a youth and a young girl, probably brother and sister, who stand side by side in the rigid attitudes of archaic art. The youth is nude, and holds a pomegranate in his left hand. From his wrist hangs a small round vase called an aryballos, in which athletes carried the oil with which they rubbed themselves as a part of the bath. His right hand and arm are missing, but from the analogy of similar figures we may assume that they hung loosely at his side, and they have been restored accordingly in the outline sketch that fills in the lost parts of the figure. The girl is full-draped, and carries a small flower in her left hand. The fragment containing her head and hand, as we see it here, is of plaster, the original being in the Museum of Berlin, by which it was acquired a dozen or more years ago.

On and around the upper parts of these figures are extensive remains of paint, mostly red, this being the pigment which survives the longest. Other colors were undoubtedly combined with it, but they have vanished; and even with the red we may question in some cases whether it is not the remains of a mixture of which the other ingredients have perished. It is scarcely to be conceived, for example, that artists who had advanced so far in their art as is indicated in other parts of this work, should have wilfully painted the hair of the youth with a bright vermilion, such as we see it now, or have used the same color for his eye, where it is unmistakable. If we assume, however, that this is what survives of perhaps a brownish mixture, we have a simple and reasonable explanation of its present appearance. On the edge of the eyelids are traces of black, to indicate the lashes, and the same color appears on the line of the eyebrow. The background about the head is still strongly reddish in places, and red may have been its original color, as it was frequently in Greek reliefs, but this is an additional reason for not believing that the



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hair against it was of the same tone.¹ The fragment containing the lower half of the two figures is too much weathered to show any traces of color.

Below the line on which the figures stand is a square space which is left perfectly smooth and plain. This was perhaps decorated with a painted design, as there is still part of a bright red band at the bottom; and the same may be said of the similar space above the figures. Here there are a few lines which are possibly the remains of such a design, though nothing can be made of them. Across the top of this upper space runs a broad band of dark brown, which appears to have been carried vertically down the sides of the shaft, where it is still visible on the upper half.

The finial consisted of two distinct members, an upper and a lower. The face of the lower was decorated wholly in color, its surface being entirely flat; and of the decoration fortunately enough remains to enable us to trace its design distinctly in a good light, though only by the stains it has left on the marble, as the colors themselves, with one slight exception, have disappeared. Page 99 shows this part of the finial and the pattern that was painted upon it, which consists of a combination of scrolls and "palmettes," the former making two pairs of volutes, with the palmettes introduced between them, a large one at the bottom, and smaller ones at the sides and top. The only bit of pigment remaining on the pattern is a bright red on the band which connects the upper volutes. The moulding at the bottom also shows traces of a painted ornament, in black and red.

The upper member of the finial was a seated lion or sphinx, carved in the full round, which doubtless added greatly to the effect of the whole, but nothing remains of it except the four paws, with the plinth on which they rest. This plinth is also decorated in color on its front and sides, a narrow border of red surrounding each face, with a rosette of red, black, and white in the middle of each side. The design on

the front, if there was one, is no longer visible.

The parts of the monument thus far described are all of Pentelic marble of rather coarse grain, but the block which supported the stele was of pale bluish-gray marble, from Hymettos. Of this we have some fragments, such as the greater portion of the top at the back, including the right corner, and two pieces of the inscription which was cut in its front. A third piece, containing the first two words and part of a third, was discovered some years ago, but has since disappeared. By great luck, however, a paper impression of it which was taken before its disappearance has come into our possession, and a plaster cast made from this has been inserted in its place in our restoration of the block. Its lower fracture fits exactly to one of our fragments. A discussion of the inscription and its signification will be left for Mr. Marshall's article; here we need only note that it is of a memorial character, and the fragments seem to indicate that the stele was erected by their father to one or both of the young persons represented on it. How long this inscription was we cannot tell. What is here brought together shows parts of three lines, and as the words are apparently metrical in form there was probably at least a fourth. But as we cannot tell how many lines there were, so the height of the block cannot be determined, and therefore the total height of the monument itself must remain in doubt. In our restoration we have allowed for an inscription of four lines, making the block 9 inches high, and we have set it upon a base 1 foot 8 inches high, constructed in imitation of the Attic stone called poros, which would probably have been used for the base of a monument of this kind.

As thus restored, the height of the whole monument, measured from the floor, is 13 feet 5½ inches (4.094m.); that of the stele itself, without the finial, 8 feet 8 inches. The animal on the top would have added at least two feet more, making the original height, with the base, over fifteen feet.

This stele was formerly in the possession of a private collector in England, by whom

¹There are also numerous traces of red on the hair of the girl's head in the Berlin fragment. See Kekulé von Stradonitz, *Die griechische Skulptur*, pp. 14 ff.



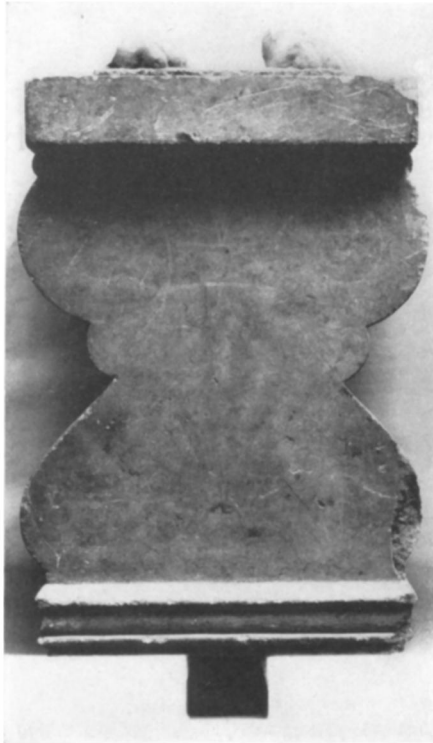
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it was accumulated, so to speak, during a period of ten or twelve years, the various fragments of which it is composed having been apparently unearthed at intervals. As has been said above, one of these fragments found its way to Berlin before its connection with the stele was known, and the torso of the youth is still missing. Yet even with these losses the stele makes a most imposing impression, and its unique importance among the monuments of early Greek art will be recognized by all who are familiar with the subject. This is especially true of the head of the youth, which is unrivalled among extant works as a masterpiece of archaic sculpture in relief, in perfect preservation, its surface as fresh as when it left the sculptor's hands. To students of Greek sculpture it will be invaluable as an illustration of the refine-

ment and the subtlety of technique which characterized the early sculptors of Attica in their struggle to express the beauty they felt in nature. The artist had not yet learned how to represent an eye in profile correctly, he did not know how to give the right expression to the mouth, but the drawing of the outline of the face is exquisite, and the face itself is modelled with a softness which shows a full appreciation of the quality of flesh, making it stand out in strong contrast to the hard surface of the background.

From its style and technical characteristics, the stele may be dated with a fair degree of certainty in the period 550-525 B. C., that is, not more than a century before the sculptors of the same school had attained the perfection of the Parthenon.

E. R.



FINIAL, GREEK GRAVE STELE